Australia

Lay head for CSIRO board

Sydney

THE initial reaction of the Australian scientific community to the appointment of former New South Wales Premier and federal president of the Australian Labour Party (ALP), Mr Neville Wran, as head of Australia's largest research body, the Commonwealth Scientific and Indust-

rial Research Organization (CSIRO), lay somewhere between surprise and shock. The parliamentary opposition described the appointment as "appalling political cronyism". Many CSIRO scientists were dismayed by Wran's appointment, which marks the end of a 60-year tradition of having a scientist at the head of CSIRO,

but this feeling seems to have given way to guarded optimism that Wran's undoubted political acumen and extensive connections with industry will be great assets.

Wran was premier of New South Wales for 10 years and federal president of ALP for 6 until his surprise resignation from both positions last July. His government would not have had to face another election until early 1988. The stated reason for his resignation was that he was tired of politics and that stepping out mid-term would give his successor time to get used to the reins of government before having to face an election.

Wran's appointment coincides with the disclosure of legislation designed to give CSIRO a new board and structure. The changes are the result of recommendations by an Australian Science and Technology Council review of the organization's operation. In the new board, policy-making and management functions have been separated to make it more like the board of a normal corporate body. The old board consisted of three full-time members, all distinguished scientists, and five part-time outside members. One of the full-time members was chairman and chief executive, a position held in the last board by Dr Keith Boardman. In the new model these posts have been split, with the chief executive becoming the only full-time member of a 10-man board. The chief executive is thus the most senior CSIRO scientist. Boardman has been appointed permanently as chief executive subject to the approval of the board which is due to meet for the first time this month.

It will be the task of the new board to align CSIRO's research ambitions with national priorities, which means increasing emphasis on industrially applicable research, particularly on that applicable to manufacturing, although Boardman is careful to point out that this does not mean a diminution in either the quantity or quality of fundamental and rural research carried out by CSIRO. In fact, the number of scientists working in rural research has increased because of more funding from outside sources despite the decreases in government money.

In addition to Wran, the part-time board members include two scientists, a farmer, a representative from the union movement and four representatives from industry, so it should be well suited to its task of linking CSIRO to the strategic needs of industry.

The Minister for Science, Mr Barry Jones, has long bemoaned the poor record of scientists for standing up in public and speaking out for their own cause, and has even gone so far as to call them "wimps". Perhaps the appointment of a politician to head CSIRO means that Jones has concluded that the best way to get the scientists' case heard is to give them a voice to speak for them.

Charles Morgan

Britain gets Cray supercomputer at last...

THE UK Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) has at last taken delivery of its Cray X-MP/48 supercomputer, after much discussion between the British Department of Trade and Industry and the US Department of Commerce.

For months, the latter has been concerned that 'foreign aliens' might gain easy access to the supercomputer which is to be housed at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. The Americans wished to impose rigid restrictions on SERC, a move vigorously resisted by the British authorities.

For logistic reasons, trade officials from both sides of the Atlantic had been unable to meet to discuss the subject, so the Americans have approved the purchase to prevent any further delay but without receiving the assurances they originally sought. The trade authorities will meet soon to discuss the 'principles' of the case. The

machine will be operational by the end of January and will run by SERC on behalf of the research councils and the universities. SERC says the Cray "will be a considerable boost for UK scientists and engineers engaged in a wide range of computer simulation problems", including the physics of liquids and solids, large-scale-integration circuit design and aircraft design.

The supercomputer has been acquired partly as a result of a report prepared for the Advisory Board for Research Councils, the Computer Board and the University Grants Committee, entitled *Future Facilities for Advanced Research Computing*, by a working party under the chairmanship of Professor John Forty of the University of Stirling, who has agreed to be chairman of the management committee for the supercomputer service.

Bill Johnstone

...and Indian supercomputer is on the way

New Delhi

AFTER protracted negotiations, India and the United States have signed a document paving the way for the sale of a Cray-XMP supercomputer to India. The deal was approved in principle by the US administration eight months ago but became bogged down because of disagreements over the US terms and conditions for its sale. Indian demands that its sovereign rights should not be violated in any arrangement and US fears about possible misuse by India and potential leakage of technology to the Soviet bloc were the bone of contention. The problems were resolved and mutually acceptable conditions of safeguards were finalized last week after three days of intense negotiations between the US delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Dean and officials of India's External Affairs Ministry. The signing of the safeguards document has cleared the way for India to become the first non-NATO country to receive the computer.

According to a US spokesman, the safeguards are similar to those applicable to US computers sold in Britain and West Germany. The United States, which initially insisted on unrestricted right of inspection to check diversion of technology to

third countries, finally agreed to exercise the right only in the event of suspected diversion. It also wanted to station US personnel permanently at the computer facility, but agreed to the Indian request that US participation should be a temporary arrangement to be reviewed after 2-3 years when Indians would be ready to man the facility on their own.

The supercomputer, which is expected to cost about \$20 million, will be installed in New Delhi under the operational control of the Department of Science and Technology. It will be used for meteorology but the United States has agreed to let India use any spare capacity for certain stipulated other areas of research excluding nuclear or defence-related spheres.

The Indo-US deal on the supercomputer is being keenly watched by Japan. As negotiations with the United States were proving difficult, India had six months ago placed orders for three supercomputers from Japan, but the export was stopped under pressure from the United States. Now that the safeguards have been worked out, Japan will have no difficulty in exporting similar computers to India, which hopes to install four of them by next year.

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